

SECRETARY OF DEFENSE WILLIAM J. PERRY
 INTERVIEW WITH JIM LEHRER ON PBS-TV PROGRAM, "THE MACNEIL/LEHRER NEWSHOUR"
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JIM LEHRER: We go first tonight to a newsmaker interview with the Secretary of Defense, William Perry. He was promoted three months ago from the number two job at the Pentagon following the resignation of Les Aspin and the withdrawal of the first replacement, Bobby Ray Inman. Secretary Perry is a mathematician who is serving his second tour in the Defense Department. He was the Undersecretary of Defense for Research and Engineering in the Carter Administration.

Mr. Secretary, welcome.

SECRETARY OF DEFENSE WILLIAM PERRY: Thank you, Jim.

LEHRER: First, on Somalia. It ended with the United -- for the United States, at least, on Friday with the departure of our last troops. Do you and others in the defense and military leadership consider that a successful mission?

SECRETARY PERRY: You have to go back to December of '92, when we went into Somalia. There were more than a thousand Somalians a day dying of starvation. We're leaving now, and as we leave that starvation problem has been solved. The political turmoil still exists.

At this point, it's up to the Somalians to be able to solve their own political problems.

But the mission was a success, in that we saved, I think, hundreds of thousands of lives who otherwise surely would have starved had we not gone in.

LEHRER: Do you agree with those who say that one of the problems there, the initial mission, the initial goals were clearly stated, but they got changed at midstream from the humanitarian feeding mission to one of trying to find an arrant warlord, and that's what caused the deaths of U.S. troops and other problems?

SECRETARY PERRY: No. I think that's an oversimplification, Jim. Because to carry out the humanitarian mission, we had to deal with the warlords who were stopping the delivery of the food which the relief agencies were there to apply. And in the early months that was done readily and effectively. When we started drawing down our forces again, I believe that encouraged the warlords to come out in force again and starting to attack the convoys and loot the food. So that drove us into our policy of dealing with the warlords.

I think, in retrospect, we overreached in that. We recognized that. And so we're now -- we've finished our mission. We're now pulling out.

But it is important to note that the humanitarian mission and dealing with the warlords was always part of the same deal.

LEHRER: All part of the problem. Yeah.

Well, Mr. Secretary, as we move from this point on, are you, as Secretary of Defense, based on the Somalia experience, do you feel comfortable recommending the use of U.S. troops in some future thing that may be similar to Somalia? Is it a legitimate function of the U.S. military?

SECRETARY PERRY: The most important function of the Secretary of Defense, policy function, as I see it, is recommending to the President when we can and when we should not use military force.

When the country is attacked, it's an easy decision to make. But in these peacekeeping operations, it's a very difficult and a very complex decision. Each case is going to have to

be considered on its own. There is no formula, no simple rule to guide us.

LEHRER: There were some -- it wasn't a majority opinion at all. But even going into Somalia, there were some folks who argued: Wait a minute. That is not a legitimate use of the U.S. military. The U.S. military is not here to go and deliver food. They are there to -- we are there -- the U.S. military has other functions in life.

You don't have any problems with using the military...

SECRETARY PERRY: No.

LEHRER: ...for this kind of thing.

SECRETARY PERRY: I completely disagree with that assessment.

First of all, the U.S. military did not deliver the food. We were there to protect the international agencies that were delivering the food. It could not have been done without military force. And in particular, the U.S. military made an enormous difference in that.

LEHRER: So, without being specific, obviously -- because, as you say, the President will come to you or somebody will come to you and say, "Hey, look, Mr. Secretary. What would be the ups and the downs of doing a certain thing?" You, as a matter of -- based on the experience of Somalia, do not come out of that saying "Oh, never again we will ever do Somalia." Quite the contrary, in fact.

SECRETARY PERRY: We will consider, and we will have the opportunity to consider in the months ahead, other applications of U.S. military power in peacekeeping operations and we will consider each one on its own merits. And I would expect that some of them, the answer will be yes and we will go in with additional military troops.

LEHRER: Now, on to Bosnia, where the United States has already committed in principle to deploying U.S. troops to help maintain a peace, if in fact there is one. Where are we along that road, from your point of view, from the defense establishment's point of view?

SECRETARY PERRY: We've made a lot of progress in just the last month and a half. The first major step forward, I believe, was in

the assertion of the ultimatum by NATO to stop the bombardment of Sarajevo. There's been 42 days now and there's been no bombardment of that city. The city's starting to come back to normal again. That was a major step forward.

In parallel with that, we began a major peace initiative. Warren Christopher formulated what I think was a bold peace plan. Ambassador Redman has been implementing that plan. It's led, as you know, already to a framework peace agreement between the Muslims and the Croats.

The challenge now, and it's a real challenge, is to bring the Serbs in that peace agreement. And as we speak, Ambassador Redman and Deputy Foreign Minister Churkin of Russia are both working together and working with the Serbs to see if we can bring them into this peace agreement.

LEHRER: Now, are you prepared, is the U.S. prepared to send in U.S. troops to help maintain this peace if it in fact comes off?

SECRETARY PERRY: We have said -- the President has said yes but he's also put certain qualifications on it. The first qualification being that we would -- that there be a real peace agreement. We're not going in, we're not going to storm the beaches and try to enforce a peace on the Bosnian people. But if they come to an agreement that's a real peace agreement, we're prepared to go in and help sustain it.

Secondly, we want to be under a NATO command and control structure.

LEHRER: Not a U.N.

SECRETARY PERRY: The U.N. will provide the overall mandate for the operation, but the command and control will be NATO, as we see it.

And finally, we -- clearly, in an operation of this size we will need to go to the Congress and get their support for it.

LEHRER: What size force?

SECRETARY PERRY: I don't know at this time, Jim. I can tell you what we'll have to do to estimate that. Namely, we have to look very carefully at what the peace agreement is and what the requirement for military forces to enforce it. We have told our NATO allies on

this that we will be less than half of the total force. In a very earlier peace plan, there was an estimate of 50,000 troops would be needed. And on that peace plan, we would have been asked to provide perhaps 25,000. I would hope that this particular peace agreement may require somewhat fewer troops than that, but we don't know at this stage until we see the final terms.

LEHRER: But if it does require 25,000 U.S. troops, those 25,000 U.S. troops will be provided. Is that true?

SECRETARY PERRY: We would propose to do that and we would redeploy troops we now have in Germany for that purpose.

LEHRER: Now, the reason -- explain why you want these troops under NATO control rather than U.N. control. 'Cause the troops there now, the peacekeeping troops there now are under U.N. control, not NATO control. Is that right?

SECRETARY PERRY: Yes.

The troops now in Bosnia number less, somewhat less than 10,000. And they're being very ably led, I believe, by Lieutenant General Michael Rose, a British general who's operating under U.N. authority. But as you get to a size of force of 30, 40, 50 thousand troops and you have a real military, complex military operation, and where you really need a sophisticated and tested command and control system, there is no system in the world for bringing together a multinational force like this except the one that has been developed by NATO.

We spent four decades developing that system. We ought to use it in a case like this.

LEHRER: Is there also a political part of this equation, that there's some resistance, particularly in Congress, of turning the control of U.S. combat troops over to the United Nations?

SECRETARY PERRY: I think whatever resistance in Congress there is, is based on the problem that I described to you. They simply see the importance of having adequate command and control, and they recognize that that has been well developed through the years in NATO.

LEHRER: And I take it you share that view.

SECRETARY PERRY: Yes, I do, very

strongly.

LEHRER: Yeah.

All right. You've just returned from an eight-day trip to Russia and some of the other republics of the former Soviet Union. Are you concerned, as others are, about the possibility of armed hostilities between some of these old parts?

SECRETARY PERRY: We start off by observing that the most significant event in the last decade has been the collapse of the Soviet empire and the establishment of friendly relations between the United States and Russia. This has been an enormous relief to us. It's relieved us of the threat of a nuclear holocaust. It's relieved us of the burden of having more than 300,000 troops in Europe, as well as the burden of our allies. But what the Russians and their nearby neighboring countries are trying to do right now, which is massive reform, political, economic and social all at the same time, is truly unprecedented. And it's precarious, very precarious.

I think no one can predict the outcome of that. Certainly no one, including outside of Russia, including the United States, can control the outcome. But we believe we can influence it, and the policy of this Administration is to make every effort to try to influence it. Because the difference between a positive outcome and a negative outcome is so important and so profound that we owe it to ourselves and we owe it to our children to try.

LEHRER: But there's been talk of sending peacekeeping troops into that area in the future. And it's even been suggested maybe even the United States might have to be involved in that. Has that been put on your table as yet?

SECRETARY PERRY: Yes. We have discussed that, particularly relative to peacekeeping forces in Georgia. We've discussed it with Mr. Shevardnadze when he was here. With discussed it -- Ambassador Albright has discussed it in the U.N.

Our position is that any peacekeeping forces in Georgia ought to be under U.N. mandate, that they ought to -- and the U.N. is seriously considering putting together such a

force -- that they ought to be less than a majority of them Russians and that any Russian forces in there ought to be under the U.N. mandate -- that is, wearing blue helmets.

LEHRER: Not go in there unilaterally as Russian troops.

SECRETARY PERRY: Not go in unilaterally but go in under U.N. mandate.

There's some advantages to the Russians in that, as well, as that could help defray the costs of the operation.

So, yes, we think that's viable.

We are not proposing to send U.S. troops into the Georgia peacekeeping. We don't think it's necessary. But as U.N. members, we would help support that through the assessments we make. So we would provide financial support, but are not planning to provide troops.

LEHRER: Just based on your trip, did you feel like something like that may be in the cards fairly -- sooner rather than later?

SECRETARY PERRY: Yes. I think it's possible that there may be a peacekeeping operation, U.N. peacekeeping operation in Georgia sooner rather than later. The situation is desperate there.

What is between the U.N.'s decision to start that and the present situation is trying to get a peace agreement. Again, the U.N. does not want to go in and try to enforce a peace on the parties. They want them first of all to come to a peace agreement. And if they do that, then the U.N. is prepared to go in with military troops that will help maintain and sustain the peace.

LEHRER: Another one of your purposes on your trip, Mr. Secretary, was to speed along the process of dismantling and destroying and otherwise eliminating the old Soviet nuclear force. Can you give us a summary status report on where matters rest at this point?

SECRETARY PERRY: Yeah. We had, actually, three related objectives. One of them was helping on the process of dismantling the nuclear weapons. Secondly was in help, assisting in the defense conversion, converting some of the massive Russian defense factories into the production of civilian goods. And also establishing more closely the defense, the

defense relationship we have with Russia. I say Russia but we also visited Kazakhstan and Belarus and Ukraine. So all four of those countries...

LEHRER: All four. Uh-huh.

SECRETARY PERRY: In terms of the dismantling, the main objective was to follow up on the implementation of the agreement signed by the three presidents in Moscow in January, the so-called trilateral agreement, which was dismantling the nuclear weapons in Ukraine. And that required an agreement between the Ukrainian government and the Russian government, because the Ukrainian government has the nuclear weapons on their soil but the Russians have the facility for doing the dismantling. And it was a very difficult and complex agreement which...

LEHRER: They had to be moved from the Ukraine to...

SECRETARY PERRY: They have to be moved from Ukraine to Russia for dismantlement. And given the level of suspicion and distrust between the two countries, it was very difficult to get that kind of an agreement.

One of the most interesting and, to me, dramatic parts of that trip was the Ukrainian President, Kravchuk, and the Defense Minister, when they were visiting in Washington a few weeks before my trip, told me that this dismantling process was already under way. And I asked them if I could see it in operation, and they did allow me to do that. So I went town to Pervomaysk, which is one of the major ICBM operational sites in the former Soviet Union, now in Ukraine. And when I got there, they took me down to the control center that controlled the whole complex. And at the bottom of this 12-story elevator there was -- we walked into a little room where there were two soldiers. And they demonstrated for me, they went through the checkout of all of the missiles, the steps they go through prior to launching them. And these two soldiers controlled 100 missiles with 800 warheads, all of them, at one time, aimed at the United States. They had the capacity to unleash a power to destroy every major city in the United States. And it was, to

me, a stunning experience to stand there and watch them go through this checkout.

After we left the control center, we went to the missile silos. And they had the lids open on the missile silos and we looked down in, and there were the missiles still there, but all of the warheads were gone. They had been, the week before, put on a train and shipped to Russia.

Now, we knew from other sources that that had happened. But it was significant and symbolic to actually see those missiles there with the warheads gone.

LEHRER: Is there a danger there beyond the -- is there a real danger still there, in where these missiles are, in that whole process? Or do you feel that we're so on top of it now, it's so far down the road now, that the danger is almost gone?

SECRETARY PERRY: The danger is not almost gone, because it will take some number of years to get all of these missiles -- all of these warheads dismantled. The ones -- the Ukrainians showed me which of the silos had already had the missiles taken -- warheads taken from them, but most of them still had the warheads there. This process will take many months, because the process of dismantling, disabling a nuclear weapon is almost as complicated as the process of putting it together in the first place.

LEHRER: That, of course, brings us to North Korea.

Is there any new developments there? Is there any cooling off happened, or is it getting worse just in the last three or four days?

SECRETARY PERRY: Let me say, very directly and very emphatically, there is no danger of a military confrontation anywhere in the near future. There's no imminent military danger in North Korea.

LEHRER: And define that. What is "imminent" and "near future"?

SECRETARY PERRY: In the many weeks, or a few months, ahead.

LEHRER: Okay.

SECRETARY PERRY: There's plenty of reason to be concerned. First of all, they have more than a million men in their army, North

Korean Army, two-thirds of them based within perhaps 50 or 60 miles of the South Korean border. They have -- they're pursuing this, not only program for nuclear weapons, but for ballistic missiles, the combination of which is a matter of very great concern. And they have resisted or stalled ever effort to try to get that program stopped. And we're also concerned about the political posturing going on in North Korea today, particularly the very inflammatory rhetoric, talking about a sea of fire in Seoul. All of those reasons give us very great cause for concern.

So, we are concerned, but we are not intimidated. And we're proceeding, taking the prudent steps we need to take to provide the necessary defensive measures for our troops over there and to prepare ourselves in the event that the North Koreans take some action, which we are not projecting we are not expecting to happen, but we simply have to be prepared for it.

LEHRER: All right.

Mr. Secretary, thank you very much.

SECRETARY PERRY: Thank you, Jim.